

THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS IN THE 1920S.

The “Locarno Honeymoon”.

In the 1920s both Britain and France signed agreements outside the League while trying to look after their own positions in Europe. In the 1920s France made alliances with countries in Europe to try to keep Germany isolated. Gradually French, German and British ministers realised that a state of permanent hostility between Germany's old enemies was no good to any of them.

Germany in 1925 signed the Locarno Pact. In this treaty Germany promised to keep to the boundaries on its western borders laid down at Versailles. However, the Locarno Pact made no mention of Germany's eastern boundaries. Countries who signed the Locarno Pact with Germany like France and Britain gave others the impression that if one day Germany wanted to alter its eastern boundaries with Poland and Czechoslovakia would take no action.

In 1926 Germany became a member of the League. In the same year, the Kellogg Pact was signed by 65 countries including the USA and the USSR promising never to go to war again. The five years from 1925 to 1929 were known as the “Locarno Honeymoon”.

The LEAGUE OF NATIONS in the 1930s.

The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the Depression put an end to the honeymoon. Distrust between Germany and France grew. France began to build the Maginot Line, a huge defence system along the German border which it believed would protect France from German attack. Dictators came to power in several countries.

Manchuria, 1931.

The Japanese controlled Korea and operated the railway into the northern Chinese province of Manchuria. China was weak and split by civil war. Manchuria had iron and coal deposits and could be market for Japanese-made goods. In 1931 the Japanese army attacked and invaded Manchuria.

The Japanese generals were acting without orders from the government in Tokyo. The Japanese representative at the League promised to withdraw Japanese troops from Manchuria, but the army was doing what it liked. The army had captured Manchuria and was attacking the rest of China.

In 1933 the League condemned the Japanese Invasion, Japan left the League and carried on with its conquest in China and South- East Asia which led eventually into The Second World War. The League could do no further action to stop them.

German rearmament.

As soon as Hitler came to power he was anxious to rearm Germany. The League had failed to persuade other countries to cut down on their armaments. Germany had been told to disband most of its forces in 1919.

In 1932 another attempt to discuss disarmament was made at the World Disarmament Conference in Geneva. Again the members failed to agree. The next year, 1933, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League itself. In 1935 Britain made a naval agreement with Germany without consulting its allies.

Hitler continued to warn regardless of others countries' attitudes.

Ethiopia.

Italy had always wanted to take over Ethiopia one of the few uncolonised countries in Africa. In 1896 the Italians had invaded Ethiopia and been defeated. Mussolini also in 1934 with the Italian troops using all the weapons of modern warfare, attacked the poorly armed Ethiopians.

The League condemned Mussolini's actions and imposed economic sanctions on Italy. Britain and France were the ones who would have to make the sanctions work, and they were nervous about upsetting Mussolini. France was particularly worried about Hitler's rearmament policy.

Mussolini and Hitler were not yet allied in 1935, and France didn't want to drive them together by opposing Mussolini. Sanctions were never applied very firmly. The British Foreign Secretary worked out a deal with the French Premier for dividing up Ethiopia, which gave nearly two-thirds to Mussolini, leaving the remaining third for the Emperor Haile Selassie.

Mussolini left the League and completed the conquest of the whole Ethiopia in 1937. The economic sanctions did push Mussolini closer to Hitler. Together they signed the Rome—Berlin Axis of 1936, a treaty of friendship and co-operation.

The REASONS for the FAILURE of the LEAGUE OF NATIONS.

- **Membership:** not all the great powers were members of the League. The USA never became a member. Germany didn't join until 1926, and left in 1933. Russia was invited to join at first, but in 1934 became a member in an attempt to join forces against Hitler. Japan left in 1935.
- **Organisation:** meetings were few and far between. Decisions were made very slowly.

- **Sanctions:** they were never successful in controlling aggression. Some major powers were outside so no real collective security was possible.
- **The Treaty of Versailles:** the League was bound to uphold the terms of the treaty, to defend the peace settlement. Some of its terms weren't satisfactory and would have to be changed.
- **Britain and France:** the responsibility for making the League work failed on these two countries. Often they preferred to sign treaties outside the League, and sometimes went behind the League's back.
- **The will to make it work:** In 1919 at Versailles there was a mood of idealism which soon disappeared. The economic depression caused unemployment and a fall in the standard of living all over Europe. Dictators in Germany, Italy and Japan came into power as a result of the Depression who would not stop their aggressive policies at the request of the League.

In 1945 a new organisation was set up, the United Nations, with similar aims and determined to learn from the lessons of the failure of the League of Nations.